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TAGS: OTRA PREL ETRD ECON CO

SUBJECT: COLOMBIA: LOCAL READ OUT ON A/S SHANNON'S VISIT TO CHINA, JAPAN, AND SOUTH KOREA

REF: STATE 70035

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood;
Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Representatives from the Chinese, Japanese and South Korean Embassies in Colombia said Assistant Secretary Shannon's visit to Asia to discuss Latin America was a success. All indicated their governments' willingness to continue the dialogue and look forward to future meetings. The Chinese emphasized a desire to cooperate with the United States in the region and an interest in increased participation in Latin America-focused international organizations. They stressed the PRC has no interest in internal politics, but noted they find Chavez both unpredictable and "extreme." The Japanese noted a willingness to become more involved in Colombia's peace processes, especially if one were started with the FARC. The Koreans want to increase their development assistance worldwide, and said Colombia is a prime candidate for aid.
End Summary.

¶2. (C) In response to reftel action request, poloffs called on counterparts from the Chinese and Japanese Embassies, both of whom said Shannon's visits were a success and would lead to increased U.S.-Asia cooperation in the region. In addition, the Ambassador met with the recently-arrived Korean Ambassador to Colombia, who discussed Korea's growing interest in the region, in terms of both development and trade.

China

¶3. (C) Chinese Poloff Lunying Chen said A/S Shannon's visit was a success and the PRC looks forward to continued cooperation with the U.S. in Latin America. Chen said the visit received wide media attention in China because it was the first time someone at the A/S level had visited China to consult on Latin America. He also said the visit served to dispel the notion that the U.S. and China were competitors in the region and instead highlighted opportunities for increased cooperation to improve economic stability, with

benefits for both U.S. and Chinese businesses. Chen said the Chinese believe there are significant opportunities for joint U.S-Chinese business investment in Latin America, particularly in Brazil.

¶4. (C) According to Chen, the PRC's interest in Latin America is based on practical concerns: the Chinese need the region's raw materials, particularly oil, gas and minerals, and see an opportunity for increased exports of finished products. He stressed that the PRC has no interest in the internal politics of any country in the region, but noted that, while maintaining good relations with Chavez, the Chinese find him unpredictable and "extreme." (He also said China would be willing to be a "bridge" between the U.S. and Venezuela, given its relationship with both countries.) Despite China's interest in remaining neutral on political issues, the PRC is interested in increasing its participation in two regional organizations, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IBD). China is an observer to the OAS, but wants to play a more active role. It is not a member of the IBD and Chen said its application had not yet been "accepted." He underscored that U.S. support for Chinese participation in these international organizations is critical.

Japan

¶5. (C) Japanese Political Counselor Hiroyuki Makiuchi termed A/S Shannon's meeting with the GOJ "one of the best bilateral meetings" ever between the U.S. and Japan and said the GOJ looked forward to continued dialogue. Makiuchi

focused the conversation on Colombia and the possibilities for bilateral cooperation. The GOJ has not actively supported the GOC's peace process with the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), but would consider funding and more active participation if the GOC began a peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). In a follow up meeting, Japanese Emboff said the GOJ's foreign policy goals include fostering peace processes, but that they had a hard time with the AUC process because of its alleged links with the GOC. To the GOJ, it didn't seem like other peace processes, in which rebel groups reconcile with the government ("like Cambodia," said Japanese Emboff.) Despite reservations about the AUC process, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency has already had several meetings with the USAID Mission in Bogota to discuss cooperation on assistance to demobilized paramilitaries, victims of land mines, and reparations for victims of the internal conflict.

¶6. (C) From an economic perspective, Makiuchi noted Japanese investment in Colombia had been on the decline - and that Japanese business in Colombia use only local staff - since the murder of a Japanese national held hostage by the FARC in ¶2003. The death of the businessman, after more than two years in captivity, turned most Japanese business off Colombia. While the Japanese Embassy works to counteract this, Colombia remains a hard sell because of security issues. They noted, however, most Japanese businesses in Colombia also have offices in Venezuela and that Colombian businessmen get higher marks for competence and efficiency than their Venezuelan counterparts. Makiuchi said the GOJ is concerned about Venezuela's "unpredictability," especially as several Japanese businesses anticipate renegotiating contracts with Venezuelan firms in the next three to four years. In general, Emboff said the Japanese look to the U.S. for guidance on political issues in the region, particularly on the leftward move of several governments in the region.

South Korea

¶7. (C) Ambassador Guido Song, the new Korean Ambassador to Colombia and an academic specializing in Latin America, was

not able to comment in detail about recent meetings between the ROK and A/S Shannon. He noted the meetings were productive and that ROK is interested in expanding cooperation with the U.S. in the region.

¶8. (C) ROK Ambassador Song said Korea intends to increase its overseas development assistance from less than a percent to more than 2 percent, focusing on developing countries. Ambassador Song said one criterion in determining which countries would get Korean aid was whether they helped Korea during the war. In this regard, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Colombia and Turkey are prime candidates for aid because they sent troops in support of South Korea and are in need of development assistance. He noted, too, that Colombia's improved security situation increased the likelihood that both the ROK and Korean business would invest in Colombia in the future.

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